MORE SHEEP
MORE WOOL

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BY

ALFRED DECKER

of Alfred Decker & Cohn, Chicago, before the Annual Convention of the Ohio Retail Clothiers' Ass'n. February Fourteen, Nineteen Seventeen

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This gathering, bringing together the merchants of this great state, is another evidence of the co-operative spirit prevailing at the present time, and saturating more and more the scattered business interests with the idea of finding and analyzing the common grounds upon which your business can grow and prosper. To learn from one another, to bring out the defects of one side of a question, and exult in profitably spreading over your membership the application of a good, or rather a better, point, is a cause worthy of note and a bright spot in the industry in which we are all engaged. It is a sign of a higher plane of co-operation, of unselfish devotion to our pursuits. Just look a step forward and think of the next generation in the retail clothing business. Young men who are today reared with the thought that associations are a part of our business existence, that competitors are friends from whom we can seek counsel and advice! This thought in mind makes me regret not being able to live long enough to see and experience the great benefits that must come to the future merchants, and the expediency with which they will be able to handle difficult questions. Besides, the many fundamental matters that present themselves, and which I am sure your body has wrestled with successfully since assembling here, I am venturing

to bring before your consideration a subject of great importance in this critical period through which we are now passing.

"More Sheep, More Wool"

I am referring to the great shortage of the raw material upon which our entire industry rests, and from which it is created, namely, the dearth of wool—yes, the famine which seems to confront us, and from which there appears no relief. Let us examine the physical condition of the wool, and thereby naturally also the sheep industry. It will reveal some startling figures. It will show how imperative it is that we clothing manufacturers and retailers get behind the "More Sheep, More Wool" campaign, for which I am pleading before you this evening.

This movement was started recently and culminated a few days ago in a larger way in the National Sheep and Wool Bureau, located in Chicago. The whole idea is to bring about an awakening and a stirring up of everybody interested, from the very producer to the very consumer. It is contemplated to carry out a thorough campaign of education. The big men of the industry have evidenced a willingness to lend their time because they are fully aware of the impending crisis. The technical experts have assured their services. The great rank and file of the trade must now give this movement a helping hand. We are a unit on such economic questions as social uplift and will do all in our power to improve working conditions in factory and home. We stand virtually united in favor of such good measures as child labor laws, trade and transportation regulation, pure fabric legislation; we are against fraudulent advertising, etc., but right here is an issue that strikes the very marrow of our busi-

ness existence. We must not, cannot, overlook it. We must come to its rescue, and merchant and manufacturer alike must lift his voice and his hand to give this propaganda an impetus.

Wool is one of the few, everyday essentials that we do not raise here in the United States in sufficient quantity to meet our wants. Virtually all other raw products that we require for our daily use are produced in excess of our needs. We have lots of those to sell to other foreign lands. I shall not worry you long with figures, but statistics, dry as they may appear, are necessary to bring this evil emphatically before you. We consume in this country approximately five hundred and fifty to six hundred million pounds of wool a year. We raised last year two hundred and eighty-eight million pounds, which means that we were obliged to import about three hundred million pounds. These two hundred and eighty-eight million that we raised were produced by 48,625,000 sheep. Now, as far as numbers are concerned, the sheep industry is in a sick and unhappy condition, though not altogether in the throes of dissolution, and there is hope—if we get busy. It is now rapidly on the toboggan —and we must save it. Our several interests must integrate into a single unit. In every European nation there is intensive conservation of national resources. Only God knows how soon Uncle Sam will find it necessary to follow suit. And, gentlemen, intensive conservation of national resources must be backed by the organized moral support of the people.

Our Sheep Decreasing As Population Increases

This sheep proposition looms large in the all-important question of national preparedness. Our population is increasing, our sheep are decreasing. Where in 1900 one

million farmers kept sheep, and in 1910 three-quarters of a million, today, judging from good sources, there are only about one-half million engaged in raising wool. There are today thirteen million less sheep in the United States than in 1900. There are nominally five hundred million sheep in the world, producing a clip of twenty-eight hundred million pounds. The armies are now consuming two billion, therefore there is left but eight hundred million pounds for civilian purposes. Since the war serious inroads have been made on this number. In the warring countries sheep have been slaughtered by the millions. It is difficult to venture a prophesy on what will happen after the war, but it is fair to presume that England will first cover her own needs, and then parcel out to her allies the clip of Australasia and South Africa. The United States will come last, and all nations will fight for the wool of South America, which, however, is more likely not to increase materially, as her best grazing lands are being cut up for farms and grains. Grain growing always comes ahead of grazing in most countries.

Canvass the foreign situation and there is little promise for increased sheep stocks for many years. Today we are virtually barred out of foreign wool supplies. Now, then, to revert to our own country, we are growing less wool today than in 1885.

Sheep Raising Today Compared with Former Years

In seven years our clip diminished over thirty and one-half million. Ohio, your great state, had seven and three-quarter million sheep in 1860; today she has three million. At one time Ohio was the first sheep state in the Union. Seven years ago 75,000 farmers kept sheep in Ohio; today hardly 50,000.

Now, let us see where some of the eastern states stand. In 1900 Michigan had two and three-quarter million; today she has 1,800,000; Indiana had one and three-quarter million; today, one million; New York had one and three-quarter million, today 840,000; Pennsylvania slumped from one and one-half million to 850,000, and so all the way down. Texas has two and one-half million against eight million in 1883, and the state of Texas could, if the country were fenced, support enough sheep to supply the whole nation. The far western states show the same ratio of decrease; only two or three states show a slight increase.

We are now asking ourselves this question: Should this country depend upon foreign lands to supply our necessities? Such a proposition is incompatible with the great program of national preparedness. There is room aplenty for more than 150 million sheep in the United States. There are many million and million acres of cut-over land in the North and South awaiting the golden hoof that enriches every good inch of ground it treads.

Sheep Enrich the Land

Just compare England with our situation. You can put that whole country in the upper and lower peninsula of Michigan and yet they have thirty million sheep. If they can raise wool profitably on land valued at from $500 to $2,000 per acre, why not here? Sheep have made England the richest agricultural nation of its size in the world. Without sheep, millions of acres of chalk, so-called barren land in England, would be useless for the production of farm crops. But sheep are the greatest fertilizer. Give the South thirty million sheep and that question will soon be settled. Put sheep on the worn out

farms of New England and you will no longer see her sons move away.

On January 1st the total visible supply of all kinds of wool in the United States was estimated at seventy-eight millions. Fifty-eight millions of same was domestic, twenty millions foreign. Considerable of that has since been used up. There is little likelihood of further importation this year or next. Submarines and wool are incompatible.

Mr. Elliott, the Boston expert on wool, recently said that wool prices would stay in the clouds for ten years. I believe it. They are now predicting 40-cent cotton and I am told that 40-cent cotton means 75-cent wool.

Now, then, you will say to yourselves, "If the price of wool will rise, it will be profitable to raise more sheep, and automatically an increase of numbers will be the result of same." And so it will be. For supply and demand regulate everything. It is the great governing law of business. But for the very nature of the article, and the time it takes to make the necessary headway, the movement now started is to assist as much as possible and to urge upon everyone concerned the immediate attention required.

Your association in all states must get behind this and must act in a unit with the newly established bureau.

There must ring through this country our voices for immediate action to stimulate and advance all steps to obviate this great shortage. I should feel highly repaid for the good of our industry at large if my word of warning were heeded, and action taken to endorse and contribute actual assistance to this propaganda.

The bureau will soon be in full swing for a national campaign. Ways and means will be devised by which you and others can help, and such practical suggestions as the bureau will make will be circulated everywhere. The head of one of the largest sheep owners' associations has been chosen temporarily to lead this cause. In a financial way, it is to his disadvantage to increase the supply of wool, for that may lessen the price he may get for his crop, but this man is setting aside his own interest for the public good. He is a broad minded man who is fully aware of what's what.

His example is inspiring. Let us follow his lead and lend assistance to further a program that strikes at the very roots of our business.

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